

## The Federal Diary

## Conferees Get Bill to Cut Travel Funds



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Senate and House conferees this week will take up an omnibus appropriation bill that would slash travel funds for federal agencies 25 per cent below their present level. Agencies now spend around \$2 billion a year sending employees somewhere else.

The travel cut proposal was added by the Senate as one of 85 amendments to a supplemental money bill (H.R. 16900) that has cleared the Senate and House in different forms.

One of the amendments that Senate and House leaders will have to approve, modify or discard before they can send the legislation to Mr. Ford would limit federal agency travel funds for the remainder of this fiscal year (which ends June 30) to 75 per cent of the amount obligated in fiscal 1974. For most government agencies that would mean fewer travel dollars and would force them to cut trips and, if possible, reduce per diem payments to travelers.

Travel could be reduced more than 25 per cent if Congress continues with plans to raise the daily expense account rate for out-of-town trips from \$25 to \$35. If the per diem is set at a minimum \$35, it would mean

U.S. agencies would have to pay their official travelers more money, while at the same time cutting back travel itself.

If the Congress should establish the new \$35 per diem as a maximum figure, and the 25 per cent travel fund cut is approved, that would mean many agencies would be forced to pay employees less than \$35 on trips in order to conserve travel dollars.

The 25 per cent travel cutback, proposed by Sen. William V. Roth Jr. (R-Del.) has strong bipartisan, liberal-conservative backing. That means that the Senate conferees will fight hard to retain the reduction feature as they hassle with their House colleagues over it and the other 84 amendments.

The exact amount Uncle Sam spends on travel each year is fuzzy. The General Accounting Office has pinned it down to somewhere in the neighborhood of \$2 billion paid for out-of-town travel, meetings and conferences. The 25 per cent cutback, which supporters claim would save \$400 million annually, will have strong appeal in this time of belt-tightening rhetoric.

Susan B. Anthony Day? A growing number of Senate and House members are backing bills that would make the Feb. 15 birthday of the famous suffragette a legal holiday. That would bring to 11 the number of bank and government shutdowns each year. Uncle Sam pays out \$145 million each time there is a holiday, plus additional premium pay to federal

aides who have to work while their colleagues are off.

**Federal Firefighters:** The Civil Service Commission is wrestling with new guidelines for applying the Fair Labor Standards Act to premium pay compensation for government firemen. The new law gives the Labor Department jurisdiction over most overtime, compensatory time and premium pay rulings, but leaves CSC the chore of deciding how they will be applied in government.

Most federal firefighters now work a 72-hour week for which they get a substantial premium pay differential. Changes that will be required because of the new law could force work-week cutbacks. CSC is trying to figure out how to apply them without forcing U.S. agencies to pay

more overtime and to keep from cutting the salaries of federal firefighters who mostly work at defense installations.

**Telephone Progress?** Capitol Hill callers can no longer dial CA 4-3121 and ask to be connected with their favorite congressman (or woman). Now, operators have been instructed to give the caller the direct-dial number of the member in question, rather than make the connection.

This will mean that frequent callers on the Congress will have to maintain little black books with over 400 House and 100 Senate members if they want prompt service. The first outfit to come up with an up-to-date, compact Capitol Hill telephone directory should make a fortune from lobbyists and the press.